

# FACT SHEET

COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

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## About the Department

The Tennessee Department of Education strives to make Tennessee the fastest-improving state in the nation. The department supports districts across the state in reaching ambitious goals for raising student achievement and closing gaps between groups of students.

Tennessee has been [called](#) "Exhibit A" in education reform by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. In 2012, Tennessee students made their largest statewide test score gains in history. The state also began implementing the first comprehensive, student-outcomes-based teacher evaluation system in the country.

## About Education in Tennessee (2011 figures)

### Area

School Districts: 137  
Centers of Regional Excellence: 8  
Miles of bus routes, one-way, each day:  
311,074  
Operating expenditures: \$8.1 billion  
Expenditures per pupil: \$9,084

### Schools

Schools: 1,736  
Elementary schools: 1,008  
Middle schools: 319  
Secondary schools: 355  
Vocational schools: 17  
Special education schools: 10  
Alternative schools: 21  
Public charter schools: 70

### People

Students: 934,246  
Teachers: 65,009  
Librarians: 1,609  
Nurses: 994  
Administrators: 4,662

### Student breakdown

White: 67.4 percent  
African American: 24.2  
Hispanic: 6.2 percent  
  
Economically disadvantaged: 60.3 percent  
  
Graduation rate: 85.5 percent  
Annual number of graduates: 62,147

## Department Initiatives and Terms

**First to the Top** – Tennessee was one of the first two states to win the federal government’s Race to the Top competition in 2010. The \$501 million awarded to the state will continue to fund [First to the Top](#) education reforms in Tennessee through 2013-14.

**No Child Left Behind Waiver** – Tennessee was granted a waiver from certain portions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind, in 2012. The waiver allowed the state to design [its own accountability system](#) focused on growth and improvement.

**Accountability system** – The department follows how districts and schools are progressing towards their goals of raising achievement levels and closing gaps between groups of students. Under its new accountability system, the department categorizes districts as **Exemplary, Intermediate, In Need of Improvement or In Need of Subgroup Improvement**. It names top-performing and top-progressing schools as **Reward Schools**, while the lowest-performing schools are **Priority Schools**. Schools, regardless of achievement level, with the biggest achievement gaps between groups of students are named **Focus Schools**.

**Achievement School District** – Priority Schools, which score in the bottom 5 percent in the state, are eligible to join a state-run school district. The [Achievement School District](#) is set to dramatically turnaround these schools and bring them up to the top 25 percent in the state within five years. The ASD debuted in the 2012-13 school year with five schools in Memphis and one in Nashville.

**TCAP** – Tennessee’s statewide standardized tests are known as the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, or TCAP. TCAP includes Achievement tests for reading, math, science and social studies in grades 3-8 and End of Course exams for core subjects in high school.

**Centers of Regional Excellence** – The department’s eight regional offices are known as Centers of Regional Excellence, or COREs. They assist districts in data analysis, professional development and other support functions focused on raising student achievement. The CORE offices were previously known as Field Service Centers and were relaunched with new staff and a new vision in 2012.

**Common Core State Standards** – Tennessee is one of 46 states that have committed to transitioning to the Common Core State Standards, a set of standards designed to improve college and career readiness by making classroom studies more applicable and relevant. With Common Core, teachers will go deeper with fewer standards. More about Tennessee’s transition can be found at [TNCORE.org](http://TNCORE.org).